

# RIGHT AND WRONG FROM THE MIDDIES' VIEWPOINT

A Times Staff Correspondent Stationed at Annapolis Voices the Midshipmen's Side of the Hazing Question.

THE NAVAL ACADEMY at Annapolis is in the limelight just now, and has been since the Meriwether tragedy directed the eyes of the country to the training school of its future sea fighters. Reports of the Meriwether trial and the two hazing trials that followed have been wired out of the little Maryland city to every section of the United States, and have been printed day after day in practically every newspaper in the country. Long editorials on the subject of right and wrong in the middies' daily life have appeared in thousands of newspapers and periodicals.

But what of the Middies' side of the controversy? What is their point of view on the question of right and wrong in their four years' life at the Academy?

The outside world reads the story of their "hazings," their "runnings," their "code of morals," their "traditions," their "class distinctions"—a dozen other phrases more or less meaningless to the uninitiated—and asks what it all means. What is the explanation from the Annapolis end? What have the midshipmen to say for themselves?

To answer these questions a Times staff correspondent, who has been detailed at Annapolis since the beginning of the trials, gives the Middies' side of the question. He has associated with the upper class men and the plebes—with the officers at the Academy, and the intelligent citizens of Annapolis who know and understand the Middies. His story is a careful reflection of what the Middies themselves have to say on these questions. An impartial presentation of their point of view.

Annapolis, Md., Jan. 6.  
Hazing from the midshipman's point of view?

The inside story of the traditions of the Academy, the sacred code of honor, which governs the Middies by an unseen force, and why hazing is not stamped out by those in authority?

It's an old story. It is known to all the officers here, and the plebes are made acquainted with it within a few hours after they enter the Academy.

Hazing, or running, or whatever name you choose to give it, is an inheritance. It's hazy with tradition. For fully half a century it has stalked through the corridors and rooms of the midshipmen. The officers in charge—and by that is meant the officers who have seen duty here during the past fifty years—have seen the spectre at different hours, but it is not written that anyone ever made a really serious attempt to kill it. The only power that could or can subdue or keep in subjection this raw-head-and-bloody-bones, which just now holds a prominent place in the public eye, is the first class of midshipmen. As stated to The Times' correspondent there is not today an officer in the navy below the rank of captain who has not been hazed and very few, indeed, who have not indulged themselves in the practice. Even Rear Admiral Sands, superintendent of the Academy, is quoted as saying that during his plebe year he was hazed.

It is true there are rules and regulations for the government of the Naval Academy, and, generally speaking, these rules and regulations are lived up to by the midshipmen. But it's the rules, or rather, the "rates" prescribed by the first class men that control the great body of cadets. The officers may say they know nothing of these "rates," that is, they do not sanction them. But, nevertheless, they are the same "rates" to which they subscribed when they were midshipmen. These "rates" inculcate into the cadets' discipline that serves them in good stead in after years. They weed from the service every boy who has a streak of yellow in him. So claim the supporters of the system. And the supporters, if the truth would be known, embrace every midshipman and officer in the service.

## Must Pay the Penalty.

"Rates," as defined by the first class men, is only another name for precedent. Seniority is what counts, and the midshipman who has the temerity to overstep the line must suffer the penalty. If a plebe, he gets his medicine in the shape of physical exercises called "stunts," the severity of which depends on the gravity of his offense. If a youngster—a third class man—he may be "papped," which is put on the report, or receive a challenge for a fight. And right here it can be stated that the plebe who refuses to take an order from an upper class man to do a "stunt," in other words submit without question to hazing, will have to fight. The rebellious plebe is reported by the upper class man to the president of the class and a court, often ten or fifteen pounds lighter than the plebe, is selected by the class to challenge the obstinate plebe. A challenge under those conditions has never been known to be refused. If the

plebe wins he must fight again, and so on until he is knocked out or the upper class is satisfied. But the plebe can stop the fighting by submitting to the hazing. Sometimes one fight is sufficient, after which there is no further kicking against hazing.

When the plebes enter the Academy they come with a full understanding of the traditions which govern. Sometimes when an upper class man orders a plebe to report to his room he will kindly tell him just what he must do and point out to him the little distinctions that exist between the plebe and the youngsters and the second and first class men. There is generally some reason for the hazing administered.

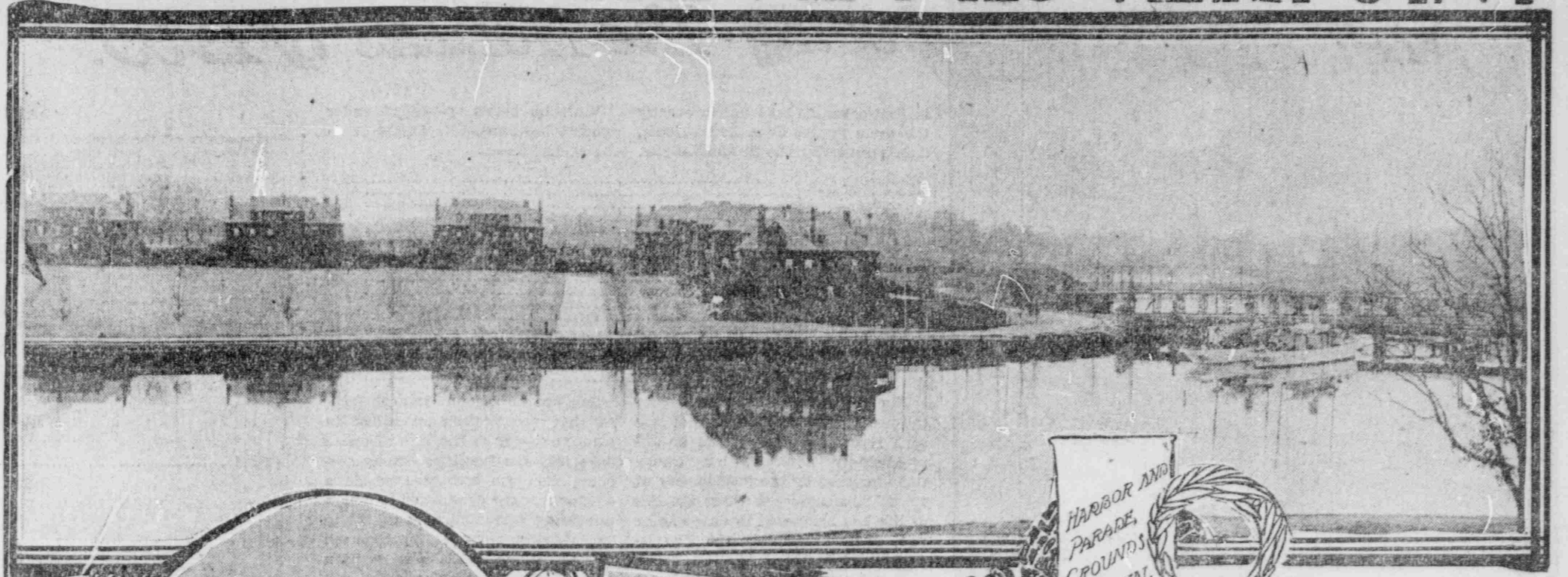
For instance the plebe may be careless in his dress, or person, his table manners may be imperfect, there are a hundred and one little things for which he could be put on the report, but instead of doing that the upper class man, under whose observation the offending plebe may come, will administer or cause to be administered several hazing stunts. And if an improvement is not noted the hazing is repeated with interest.

## May Appeal to Class.

But to revert to the "rates," which are made by the first class. These "rates" are for the protection of the plebes. If any upper class man should seek to take an undue advantage of a plebe or carry the hazing too far, the plebe has the right to report the case to the first class and the offending upper class man is promptly "called down." A plebe, if he feels that he has been insulted or wronged, can challenge the upper class man, and if the upper class man is larger than the offending plebe then the upper class selects one of their number to espouse the plebe's cause. The entire spirit that prevails among the cadets is one of "frat." What affects one affects the entire class and becomes a class cause.

As the plebes, or fourth class, have no class president it devolves upon the members of the first class to look after the plebes and therefore it follows that without the sanction of the first class there could be no hazing or running. Let it be borne in mind, however, that as a rule the members of the first class do not haze.

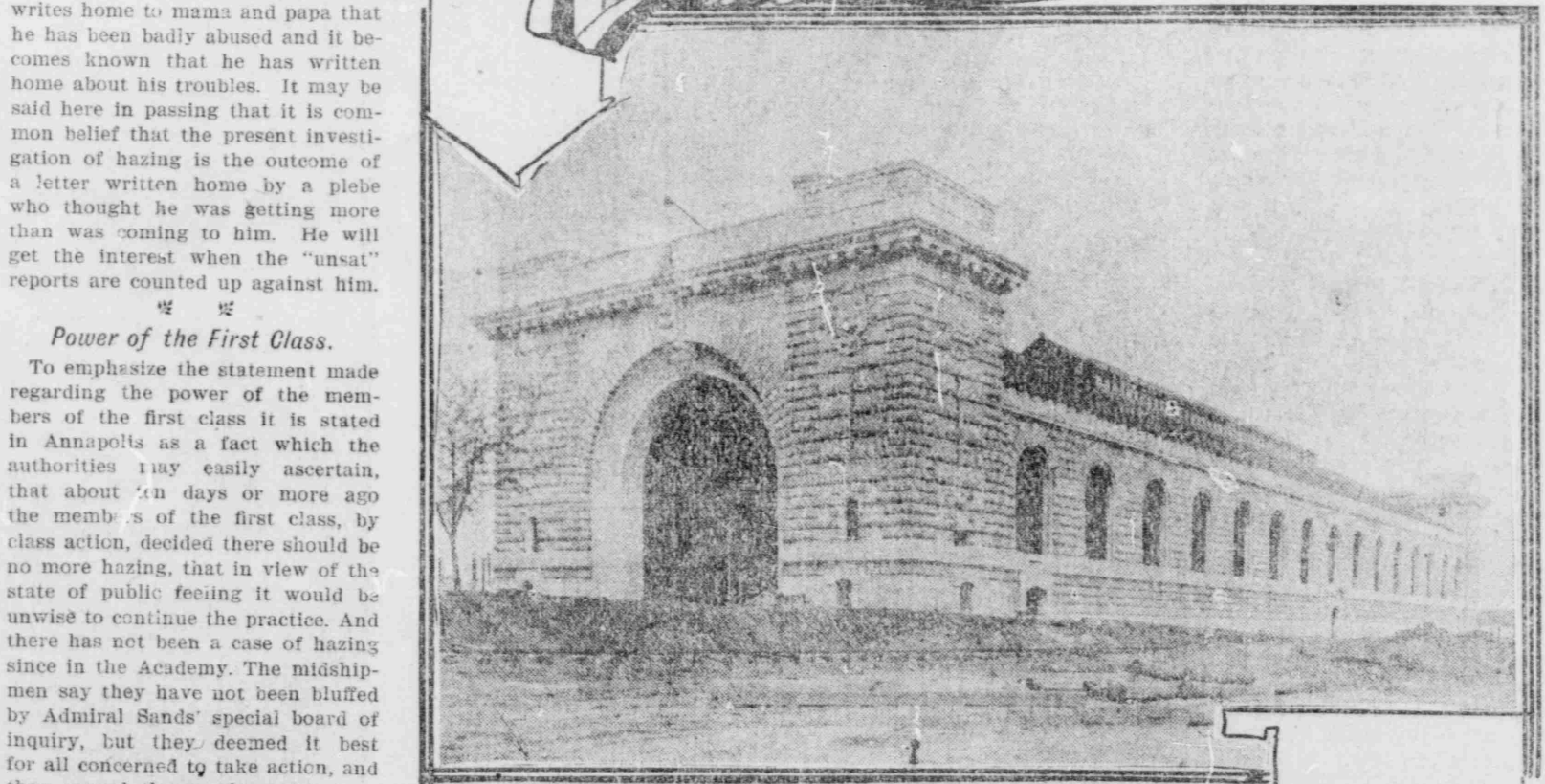
The plebe year is looked upon as the easiest of the four years. The plebes enter just as the cadets of the third, second, and first class start on their summer cruise, and during the recess, or until the Academy term begins, the plebes are drilled and broken in so that when the upper class returns some of the green is worn off. In the meantime the plebes have become saturated with the air of tradition, which is so powerful that a layman feels it after an hour or two of mixing with the midshipmen and officers. No plebe has ever been known to report an upper class man for hazing, and if such a thing could be possible the plebe making the report would never in a thousand years get through the four-year course. He would be found by the professors "unsat" in all his studies, and that would "blaze" the reporting plebe in very short order. There is no concealment of this, nor is the fact proclaimed from the ramparts, but it exists just the same.



REAR ADMIRAL JAMES H. SANDS, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE NAVAL ACADEMY



RIGGING SAILS IN A COMPETITIVE DRILL



THE NEW ARMORY

To say the authorities at the Academy were in ignorance of the almost daily practice of hazing up to the time the first class took action is ridiculous. It was brought out with great force and clearness at the Meriwether court-martial that the code of honor was not a dream, a myth or something intangible, but was an unwritten law

with all the force and power of custom behind it. Midshipmen were sent to the hospital to have their bruises and wounds dressed, but the officers in charge never reported them for fighting, notwithstanding that fighting is against the regulations as much so as hazing. And why were the middies not reported for fighting? Because it is one of the traditions of the Academy and

the middies have it instilled in them that the traditions are sacred. And tradition is the defense of hazing or the "system."

It is even said that now and then some instructor becoming impatient because of a plebe's slowness in grasping a question will remark: "I'd like to stand you on your head a couple of times." That is accepted by upper class men as a tacit

suggestion to make that plebe do a stunt or two after supper. And you may set it down that the plebe will be visited in his room by an upper class man and ordered to do some physical exercise.

Only a few years ago hazing became so common and open that Admiral Brownson, then in charge of the Academy, decided to put a stop to it. And he did stop it, but only

A LINE OF MIDSHIPMEN BROWN UP TO RECEIVE VISITORS

through the co-operation of the upper classes. He knew the traditions of the Academy and he knew the influence of tradition on the midshipmen.

The assertion is openly made by the upper class men that if the question of hazing or no hazing was put to a vote among the plebes hazing would carry by an almost unanimous vote.

The stories printed that the plebes are not allowed to accept invitations to dances given by citizens of Annapolis came under the head of fairy tales. The plebe must respect and give due deference to their seniors, and must always answer "yes, sir," or "no, sir." They must observe the rates and refrain from walking in any part of the grounds reserved for the upper class men.

Indeed, this rule applies to the third and fourth class men as well. Certain "beats" are for members of the first class, second class, third class, and fourth class. If a youngster—third class man—should attempt to take a "beat" reserved for the second or first class, or a second class man get into a "beat" of the first class, he would be called down hard, and if he "got gay" he might have to fight. And this brings to mind that while Admiral Brownson stopped hazing he did not interfere with the code of honor where it was involved in any case that had the approval of the upper class.

The plebe who has been cock of the walk at his home, or who boasted that he comes from Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, is easy picking for the youngsters. In a very few weeks after the opening of the Academy year he has the conceit taken out of him.

It will not do to say that the officers in charge connive at hazing, but to say that they are not cognizant of it is to say that snow is black. This does not mean that the officers approve hazing. But they have been through it, and they know it is tradition, and they know legislation will not stop it—at least the legislation now on the statute books, under which these trials have been conducted, has not stopped it. But the action of the first class has stopped it. And this goes to prove that the unwritten law of the Academy is supreme. C. R.